

CHRONICLE AND COMMENT OF THE STAGE



Jessico Brown in "A Lonely Romeo"

Mabel Withee in "The Scandal of 1919"

Janet Delie in "La La Lucille"

Marjorie Gatenon in "The Gaieties of 1919"

Ruth Harrington in "Tumble In"

Jeanne Eagels in "Daddies"

"Daddies"

Grace Fisher in "The Royal Vagabond"

Knockabout Comedians Subject to Dramatic Laws

By Heywood Brown

There must be some definite technique in the business of knockabout comedy, but it is probably a subtle thing. We say "subtle" defensively, because we have never been able to grasp an inkling of it. At the first performance of the Ziegfeld Follies, for instance, there was an abundance of violent comedy. When Dooleys were not falling about the stage somebody was trying to gouge an eye from the face of Bert Williams. Now, these things were not exactly funny. Johnny Dooley and Ray Dooley were found not as inspired as William and Gordon Dooley, of the Winter Garden and the Century Roof. They were funny at times, but not consistently so. On the other hand, Cantor's scene in the office of an osteopath was furiously amusing all the time. It was perhaps as fine a slapstick sketch as we have ever seen in the theatre. We think that the difference in the success of these performers working in the same field may lie in the fact that no matter how extravagant the violence of the Cantor sketch it was always motivated. There was a reason for every blow. A story was developed after a fashion between the half-nelsons and stranglegolds. The Dooleys, with a few exceptions, had no plot for their tumbles. We may cite in this connection the fact that the act of the other Dooleys on the Century Roof is built around an incident. So, too, were the various encounters between Weber and Fields in the old days. Fields always choked Weber in a good or bad cause. He never throttled him irrationally. There was opportunity for the audience to take sides. In other words, the dramatic element of conflict upon which the technicians place so much stress was preserved. If, then, two men walk out from either side of a stage and one hits the other over the head with a padded club, the incident is not amusing. But if the man on the left says, "Who was that lady I seen you walking down the street with?" and the other replies before hitting him, "That was no lady; that was my wife," the germ of a plot is present and we may laugh without shame.

Bert Williams has not been nearly as successful during the last couple of seasons as he was a few years ago, because the men who write his songs for him have neglected to supply him with material in which he may employ his most significant talent. Bert Williams is indifferent enough as a singer even of humorous songs, but he is masterly in pantomime. Many of his earlier successes were built around this. It is not enough to give Williams a song in which he says funny things. He ought to have a song in which he can act. Anybody who ever heard him sing the poker songs of several seasons ago will never forget the vivid way in which he illustrated the deal, the nature of the hand held by each player and the eventual outcome of the play. In one number in the current "Follies" due attention has been paid to this gift, and Williams has some in-

imitable pantomime in which he drinks tea. But for the rest his stints in merely words and rather ineffective words at that.

We have received the following letter: "A book column edited by a dramatic critic gives me an opportunity to ask a question which has interested me for a long time. It is this: Why do both book and play reviewers so frequently, almost invariably in fact, tell the story or plot in more or less detail somewhere throughout the review? I have never been able to understand this. For if the reader has seen the play or read the novel of course it's just so much boredom to read a synopsis; if he hasn't, a large part of the charm is at one blow destroyed for him. Take the case of 'Jimmie Higgins,' by Sinclair, for example. I read your account and determined to get the book after finishing the second paragraph. Fortunately, just as I came to the part of the review beginning 'as to the ending,' my train pulled in and I tossed the paper away. But if I had read what the ending was I should never have enjoyed the book one-half as much, for throughout I was keenly interested in trying to surmise what conclusion Sinclair would bring his reader to.

"One generally known fact seems to me to give force to my argument. There are a great number of people who like nothing better than to tell you the plot of the latest book or play they have seen or read. And these people are, in general, I have discovered, considered unmitigated bores. Surely, no reviewer wishes to place himself in that category.

"I see only three possible reasons, none of them valid, for this pernicious habit. One is that all reviewers are paid at space rates. Another is that they think the plot so transparent or unimportant that it does no harm to give it away, but surely the reader prefers to judge of this for himself. The third is that it is impossible to write a good review without so doing, to which I would answer that I have seen good reviews which omit the plot, and would not much wonder that I myself could write one of any book placed before me.

"JOHN F. WHARTON."

dramatist with a mystery play. And it was hard enough, for we are no skillful person at keeping a confidence. And yet we never breathed to a soul where the missing knife of "The Thirteenth Chair" was found or which of the many suspected persons eventually proved to be the heroine.

In reviewing all the war plays which we have seen this season not once have we allowed a reader so much as to suspect that the handsome young man who appears to be a German spy in acts one and two is in reality a captain in the American intelligence or that the heroine is actually a Red Cross nurse in disguise. In fact, to get down to the current attractions, Mr. Wharton may scan our review of the Ziegfeld Follies from end to end and he will find no hint whatsoever of the nature of the plot.

Vaudeville

PALACE—Will Morrissey and Elizabeth Brice head the bill in a condensed version of "Toot Sweet," with a cast that includes May Boley, Lon Haskell, Clarence Nordstrom and a chorus of twenty. Other features are Will M. Cressy and Blanche Dayne, Emma Huig, assisted by Jack Waldron, Mmc. Chilton Ohman, Al Herman, St. Onge and Ritchie and Charlie Chaplin in his latest film, "Sunnyside."

RIVERSIDE—The special features of

this bill are the Avon Comedy Four, Whiting and Burt, Laurie and Bronson, Valerie Berger and the Wilton Sisters, and Charlie Chaplin's latest film, "Sunnyside."

COLONIAL—Morton and Moore and Sybil Vane share the leading place. Others on the bill include Moran and Mack, Ryan and Healy, Eddie Carr and company, the Shirley Sisters, Howard Valentine and the first showing of the latest Charlie Chaplin film.

ROYAL—Clifton Crawford heads the bill, which includes Hermine Shone and Jack Denny, Ruth Royce, Nat Nazario, jr. and company, Lander Brothers, Sully and Houghton, Weber and Ridner, Gaston Palmer and "Dance Fantasies."

LOEW'S AMERICAN—Charlie Chaplin in the third million dollar comedy, "Sunnyside," will be shown on the roof and in the theatre the entire week. The vaudeville programme the first half of the week will include Arthur De Voy and company, Dora Hilton and company, the Exposition Jubilee Four, the Oklahoma Four and the three Maxim Girls. George Behan, in "Hearts of Men," will be shown in the theatre. Larry Reilly and company will top the vaudeville bill the last half of the week. Others acts will include Maurrice Samuels and company in "A Day at Ellis Island," Neil McKinley, Adonis, Taber and Green, Crane Sisters and others. "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," Hall Calne's romance, will be shown in the theatre.

THE NEW BRIGHTON THEATRE—The features are Allen Brooks in his own comedy drama, Henry Lewis, George McKay and Otis Ardine, Herbert Clifton and "Kiss Me," a new musical comedy. The supporting bill includes Charles O'Donnell and Ethel Blair, the U. S. S. Carola Trio, Diana Bonner and Felix and Fisher.

"Peek-a-Boo" Columbia All-Summer Show Being Refurbished

Frequent introductions of new musical features, vaudeville specialties and new comedy scenes in "Peek-a-Boo" have served to keep that production continually fresh, even to those theatregoers who have already witnessed the performance at the Columbia Theatre. Several new jokes and parodies by Clark and McCullough, fresh stunts by Joe Cook, and new songs by Frankie James, Emmy Barbier and Lalla Selbini are going into the production next week.



Helen Freeman in "John Ferguson"

Low Fields

"A Lonely Romeo," Mr. Low Fields's latest vehicle, is no rakish, low-lying latest model, but a large, glittering chariot with a steam callopie attachment, built after the model of the old Weber and Fields family car. It creaks in the taste of a dozen years ago, but it brings Mr. Fields back to us, and that is all that is required of it.

I was courteously waved to a seat on the trunk in his dressing room, and a moment later, in one of the intermissions of the show, Mr. Fields came in. The conspicuously striped trousers and arresting waistcoat notwithstanding, Mr. Fields has extraordinary dignity. His unusual eyes—the tragic eyes of the true comedian who sees too deep into life for any solace but the brief comfort of laughter.

Mr. Fields talks eagerly and a little wistfully. Comedy, one perceives, is really a very serious business; perhaps the most serious of all.

"Fashions have changed in comedy since the time when Joe and I started, forty-two years ago, and for the better, too. I know the old ones talk of the old stuff with tears in their eyes—but when the young ones see what their parents laughed at, they say justly, 'Was that all there was to it?'"

"And I am glad of the change in taste. It seems to me a sign of a good deal more education abroad in the world that the quieter and more intelligent forms of humor have grown in popularity. Certainly the younger generation is a good deal more sophisticated than the old. You cannot amuse them with simple horseplay.

"Joe and I poked each other's eyes and knocked each other about for a good many years, but always what I wanted to get at was the essential humanity of a comic situation. That was why I never bothered much with lines. Given funny lines to say any one can be funny. It is the humor of everyday incident of which funny lines are simply byproducts that I have tried to catch. Nearly all the funny business I have built up comes from incidents that I have actually seen. The hat scene in this piece, for instance, is something I witnessed once, and as I stood watching the salesman I made a note of it for use myself. I was sitting in a Broadway barber shop one

day and saw a man being given the hot towel treatment by a vigorous barber. The sufferings of the helpless victim were indescribable, and yet it made one of the funniest scenes I have ever staged. As I have remarked elsewhere nothing is so funny as some kinds of tragedy.

"The essence of burlesque is that it should be shrewdly planted in truth. I once saw an awkward squad of waiters being put through a drill by a head waiter in a Kansas City hotel. With very little change I put that scene into 'The Girl Behind the Counter' and it passed for burlesque. The types of waiter I used were scarcely more weird than those I had seen, and the business used as people to recognizing the extraordinarily humorous things that happen all around them that it comes as a surprise to them when they see them on the stage.

"The comedy of common things is to be expressed only in tremendously earnest characterization, the kind of characterization that is supposed to be limited only to 'legitimate' acting. It is, of course, infinitely more difficult to put a characterization over in the hurly-burly atmosphere of a musical show. It means lighting your background all the way. I know now how much easier real acting is, because I have just finished playing in one of the companies of 'Friendly Enemies.' The ease with which one can put a point across in a play is something I have not yet ceased to marvel at.

"I hope that I may find a real character to create in a real play some day. In the mean time musical comedy gives me the opportunity to present people and incidents as I have seen them. There is something in the crash and

AMUSEMENTS

RIVERSIDE	EWING
2.00	2.00
2.50	2.50
3.00	3.00
3.50	3.50
4.00	4.00
4.50	4.50
5.00	5.00
5.50	5.50
6.00	6.00
6.50	6.50
7.00	7.00
7.50	7.50
8.00	8.00
8.50	8.50
9.00	9.00
9.50	9.50
10.00	10.00
10.50	10.50
11.00	11.00
11.50	11.50

B.F. KEITH'S PALACE
BROADWAY AND 47th STREET

ELIZABETH BRICE
in "THE OVERSEAS REVUE"
with MAY BOLEY
and CLARENCE NORDSTROM

And a Broadway cast of 20 artists, including Lon Haskell, Tom Penfold, Jeanette Tourneur, Mischia Ferrento, Barrett & Masi and a Beauty Chorus. SIX SCENES.

Engagement De Luxe In a 1919 Presentation of Songs, Dance and Gowns

Feature Extraordinary WILL M. CRESSY Will Talk on His Experience with the A. E. F. in France

By Special Arrangement JACK WALDRON

CHILSON OHMAN American Prima Donna Soprano

CHARLES CHAPLIN In His Latest Film Success, "Sunnyside"

ST. ONGE & RITCHIE

WELCOME HOME AFTER A YEAR'S SERVICE ABROAD

WILL M.—CRESSY & DAYNE—BLANCHE (Unit Commanding Over There Theatre League.) Presenting Mr. Cressy's One-Act Play, "THE MAN WHO REMEMBERED."

color and inconsequentiality of musical comedy to one who has grown up in it as I have which is like the smell of sawdust to a circus performer." R. D.

Jewish Art Theatre To Reopen Garden
A new enterprise in Yiddish theatricals is announced for opening September 1. The new venture will be known as the Jewish Art Theatre, and will be housed at the Garden Theatre, in the Madison Square Garden Building. This new Yiddish playhouse will be dedicated to the better class of Yiddish plays, and also translations from the great European writers. The project will be headed by Emanuel Reicher, and will include Celia Adler, daughter of Jacob Adler, and several other well known Yiddish players.

New Plays This Week

TUESDAY—The "Greenwich Village Follies" will have its premiere at the Greenwich Village Theatre. This is the first revue devoted to New York's Latin quarter. The book and lyrics are by J. Murray Anderson and by Philip Bartholomae. Bessie McCoy Davis heads a cast of forty-two people, which includes Jimmie Watts, Suzanne Morgan, Jean Carroll, Charles Derickson, Bob Edwards and Clara Tice. A unique feature of the chorus will be that every girl taking part was formerly a model for a famous artist. The atmosphere of New York's Bohemian quarter is maintained in both the songs and plot.

AMUSEMENTS

LIBERTY THEATRE W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15 "A REAL TREAT" Journal

GEORGE WHITE'S SCANDALS 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

3 WISE GUYS 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

CRITERION 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

HENRY MILLER'S 22nd St. Theatre Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15 "RIOT-TIME FUN" Sun

LA LA LUCILLE 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

Lyceum 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

DAVID BELASCO presents

THE ROYAL VAGABOND 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

KNICKERBOCKER 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

THE FITTEST OF THE MONTH 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

JOHN CORT'S NEWEST, BIGGEST AND BEST MUSICAL COMEDY

LISTEN LESTER 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

DAVID BELASCO presents

DARK ROSALEEN 42nd St. W. 42nd St. Eves 8:15 Matinees Wed & Sat 2:15

A COMEDY OF IRISH LIFE by W.D. Howells & Whitford Kane